

The Many Sides of Jim Hopper by darkdestiney2000

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Summary: Jonathan Byers couldn't put his finger on the exact day that his mom started dating Jim Hopper. Joyce didn't have the best track record when it came to men and Jonathan didn't really understand what it was like to have a father figure around. Over time he realized that Hopper was the missing piece of the puzzle that was their family. And he was okay with that. One shot.

The Many Sides of Jim Hopper

A/N: Hello everyone! This is my first Stranger Things story and I hope you enjoy it. If anyone seems out of character, I apologize. As always, I own nothing. Please let me know what you think. I planned on this being a one shot but if anyone has any requests for an additional chapter just leave me a note. Thanks!

Jonathan Byers couldn't put his finger on the exact day that his mom started dating Jim Hopper. Their relationship developed slowly over time until one day it occurred to Jonathan that he saw the grumpy police officer as much as he saw his mother. He wasn't sure what to think of the budding relationship. His mother did not have the best luck with men. Jonathan grew up watching his father mistreat and abuse her. After Lonnie left, Joyce was single for years and it was just the three of them. Life was hard but Jonathan wouldn't have it any other way. Everyone was better off with Lonnie out of the picture even if it meant working like a dog to make ends meet. Sure, he and Joyce constantly had dark circles under their eyes and lost sleep over the checkbook. But they walked a little taller, breathed a little easier, and laughed a little more now that Lonnie didn't darken the front door.

For years, they lived in a routine that rotated around their small unit. Jonathan was in charge of breakfast and getting Will up for school. Joyce went into work early and took care of dinner. Jonathan went to class and his after school job immediately afterwards. He tried to get home for dinner but that didn't always work out. Will's job was to help with chores and to be a kid. It was very important to both Joyce and Jonathan that Will be a kid for as long as possible. Jonathan's childhood was short-lived if not nonexistent. Joyce knew that her oldest grew up too fast and it made her a little bitter. If it bothered Jonathan, he never complained. It was one of the traits that Joyce admired most of her oldest son.

Despite all of their efforts, Will's childhood came crashing to a halt on that fall night in 1983.

The fallout from that night seemed to be never ending. The nightmares came every night without fail. And they didn't only visit

Will. Before that night, Jonathan didn't think he took advantage his family. But that week embedded a sense of loyalty and protectiveness that was sure to never leave. Over time, The Byers fell back into a routine. But this routine deviated from the previous one. Jonathan would not take an extra shift and leave Will alone at night. Joyce was sure to have tabs on both of her boys at all times. And then one day, Bob Newby walked into their lives.

Jonathan kept Bob at arm's length. The man made is mom laugh, which didn't happen often. He was nice to Will and seemed to respect the family dynamics. But Jonathan was always waiting for the other shoe to drop. He was waiting for Bob to stumble in drunk late one night. He was waiting for him to lose his temper and throw something. He was waiting for him to snap at Joyce. But it never came. By the time Jonathan realized that Bob was a genuinely good guy, it was too late. He would never be able to thank Bob for saving his mom and brother.

This time the fallout was different but still tough. The house was filled with tension and sadness. Considering how much time he spent observing people, Jonathan couldn't figure out if his mother had loved Bob and was mourning the loss of the relationship or if she was sad that such a good person was needlessly taken from this world. It was probably both. She put on a brave face, but between Will's bad dreams and Joyce's tears no one got much sleep.

But just like the previous year, The Byers fell into a routine again. Work. School. Family time. Both Jonathan and Will spent more time at The Wheelers for different reasons. Joyce breathed a little easier knowing that when Will was at his friend's house Jonathan was there as well. And then the routine started to shift. It started out innocently enough. Hopper would bring El by to see her friends. Or Joyce would drive Will and Mike out to the cabin. Over time, the afternoon visits would turn into all day hang out sessions. Then one night, El fell asleep on the couch and Joyce suggested that they stay the night. For the first time in weeks, everyone slept through the night.

Jonathan liked to think that he was cautious of Hopper, but all things considered it was hard to not approve of the man who had saved his brother's life. He had to admit that Hop had more going for him then Joyce's previous boyfriends. Bob might have been the nicest guy in

the world, but a blind man could see that Hopper and Joyce shared many life experiences. Jonathan wasn't dumb or blind. No one would understand his mother and why she was the way she was like Hopper did. The same went for Hopper. Joyce may not have lost her child, but she came close to losing both of her boys more than once. They both had baggage, but his damaged parts matched hers. In more than one way, they were healthy for each other.

And though it took Jonathan a while to see it, over time it became obvious that Hopper wasn't only healthy for Joyce but for all of them. He filled a space in their lives that Jonathan hadn't realized was available.

November 1983

"So let me get this straight," Hopper surveyed the Byer's living room. A portion of the ceiling was caved in. The walls were marred with bullet holes. Clear slime pooled on the floor. "After I told you to stay put at the school, you and your girlfriend broke into the station, stole your box of monster weapons, set the bear trap up in the hallway, sliced your hand open to draw attention to yourselves, shot it, caught it in the bear trap, set it on fire, and killed it?"

"We thought it was dead," Jonathan clarified. After a moment, he added, "She isn't my girlfriend." He couldn't stop staring at the liquid on the floor. Every time he closed his eyes he saw its mouth descending on him. He didn't have the strength to push it away. His body froze in a moment of panic.

"Hey!" The chief's sharp tone broke into his thoughts. His eyes were trained on the teenager. A mixture of anger, concern, and maybe fear met him square in the eye. For a moment, Jonathan expected the man to launch into a full lecture. He looked torn between swatting him up the back of the head and yelling at him. Gearing up for either outcome, Jonathan met the man's stare with a glare of his own. Sure it had been a stupid plan, but it worked. His brother was safe and recovering. They all made it through the night with minimal damage. Jonathan would do it all again.

They sized each other up for a moment. The tension simmered between the pair.

"We'll need to dispose of all the evidence." A government official interrupted the standoff. Setting his jaw, Hopper turned his attention away from the teen. His expression making it clear that the conversation was far from over. "There can be nothing linking this to Hawkins Laboratory."

"And how do you propose we do that? Burn the house down," Hopper snapped.

"No, that would bring unwanted attention. We'll just have to put it back the way it used to be. Do you have any pictures for us to go off of?" Jonathan blinked at the question. He had plenty of pictures. But it sounded like they were going to remodel the house. He and Hopper exchanged a glance.

"You're going to fix the place up?" Hopper asked.

"We are going to restore it." The official clarified. "The carpet in the hallway is burned. The wall and ceiling have holes in them. The idea is to erase the past week."

Jonathan almost laughed at that thought. He would love to erase the past week. He'd love to have a do-over. If he could go back in time, he wouldn't have picked up the extra shift at work. He would have picked Will up from the Wheelers. None of this would have happened.

"Lonnie knows about the hole in the wall." Jonathan realized. "He was here for the funeral. He saw the letters on the wall and the lights."

"We'll leave the wall then and take care of the rest of it."

"No," Hopper said. "You'll fix all of it. And we'll tell people I fixed the wall. You all created this mess. You'll fix it." The venom in his voice made the government official blink. Jonathan smirked at the man. It was nice to have Hopper's anger directed at someone else.

"I have the pictures you'll need." Jonathan said and walked down the hallway to his bedroom. It didn't take long to find what he needed. Rather than take his photos, the official took notes and photographed

the shots to have on record. Then he left.

When Jonathan walked back into the living room, Hopper was taking in the damage again. His gaze moved from the bear trap, to the ceiling, to the wet spot on the carpet. "Where does that kid with the hair fit in all of this?"

Jonathan thought for a moment. This was the chief of police asking. He was still in trouble for assaulting an officer and Steve was involved in that also. Hopper read his mind.

"You did that to his face?" Again, Jonathan didn't answer. Snorting, Hopper shook his head. "You have the wool pulled over your mom's eyes, don't you? I know you drove up to Indianapolis too. I had a buddy sitting outside Lonnie's house." He approached Jonathan but stopped talking when he noticed something on the teen's jacket. The same something was also on the carpet. Realizing how close his run-in with the monster was Hopper released a breath and gripped Jonathan's shoulder tightly. "That was stupid."

"Saved your ass," Jonathan defended himself. Sure, he and Nancy had been reckless. But he wouldn't apologize for it. Anger flashed in the chief's eyes.

Shaking him slightly, he released the teen and rubbed his eyes. "I won't thank you for putting your life at risk." He said after a moment. "But your mom doesn't need to know about this. She's been through enough. As far as she knows, the blood drew that thing away from us and you ran. Got it? She doesn't need to know how close it was."

"Deal." Jonathan agreed. Anger still covered the chief's face; but, somewhere in his eyes Jonathan thought he could see a hint of respect lingering under the emotion. He would take the respect over the thank you any day.

December 1983

David Bowie blared through the speakers of Jonathan's old beater. Will road shotgun and bobbed his head in beat with the tune. It was the third time his brother smiled that day. The smile reached his eyes as the car barreled across the Hawkins city limits. Pushing the gas

pedal down harder, they both let out a whoop of glee. For the first time in weeks, Jonathan felt like himself. Catching his brother's eye, Will grinned again.

It'd been a terrible day. If Jonathan was being honest, every day was a terrible day since Will had gone missing. They didn't sleep. It wasn't for lack of trying, but it was a little futile. They would no longer get settled before Will would wake up screaming. He and his mom took turns looking in on him. More often than not, he would end up in one of their beds. Sometimes it was easier for Will to start out sleeping in Jonathan's bed. That way he didn't have to get up when Will's nightmares started. On the other hand, waking up with Will screaming in his ear was likely to give him a heart attack. Sometimes, if he was vigilant enough, Jonathan could wake him before it got too bad.

He couldn't blame his poor sleeping habits solely on his brother. Jonathan had his own nightmares to battle. For weeks, he saw the monster every time he closed his eyes. He felt its weight on his chest. He smelled its rank breath.

While the trio slowly got used to being sleep deprived, check-up days were the worst.

The doctors at Hawkins insisted on seeing Will on a routine basis. Right now, that meant weekly. They say the appointments will be spaced out at some point, but for now Will went in every Friday. This meant that every Thursday night was filled with anxiety and they walked on egg shells Friday. The tension was so thick that night Jonathan could have cut it with a knife. Their mom was working a late shift and it was just the boys in the house. He was sick of the house and couldn't breathe. One look at Will told him that he felt the same way. Tossing his book on the floor, he stood and said, "Let's get out of here."

"Yeah?" Will's voice was small and hesitant.

"Yeah." Jonathan nodded.

"Yeah," Will smiled.

"Go get your coat," Jonathan said and headed to his room. Pulling an envelope from his sock drawer, he leafed through the meager amount and decided to put all of it in his back pocket. He was saving up for a new camera but this was more important. Will snuck up behind him and plucked a cassette tape from the box next to his stereo. It was an older mix tape but one of Will's favorites. He grinned at his older brother, silently asking if they could take it for the trip. "Go for it. Warm up the car and get the music going. I'll just be a second." Will was gone before I finished talking. Making sure he had enough money, he picked up the phone to let his mom know where they were going.

"How far do you want to go?" He asked Will as he slid into the driver's seat.

The younger of the two shrugged. "Until we want to stop?"

Forty minutes later, they were cruising down the interstate leaving their worries behind. Jonathan knew they couldn't drive forever but there was something very therapeutic about driving away from your problems. Glancing at the clock, he could see that it was past dinner time. Will normally wasn't hungry after doctor's appointments but he figured he would ask anyway.

"You getting hungry?"

Will thought for a second before saying, "yeah, I am."

"Really?" Jonathan heard the surprise in his voice. Will nodded, looking pleased with himself. "Pizza or burgers?"

"Pizza," Will stated the obvious. Jonathan got off at the next exit. The good thing about leaving Hawkins was no one would know who they were. The brothers could enjoy a meal without being watched or having to ignore whispers from other tables.

They ate in peace and talked about nothing. It was the first time Jonathan felt normal in weeks. Will told him about the next campaign Mike was working on. Jonathan talked about new music he'd heard on the radio. When silence settled over the table, it wasn't awkward or heavy. After a moment, Will broke the silence.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Of course," Jonathan wiped his hands with a napkin.

"Did you really sleep with Mike's sister?" He asked innocently. His voice wasn't accusatory, just curious.

Jonathan didn't see the point in asking where he heard that from. The Hawkins gossip mill was constantly churning out rumors. "I stayed the night in her room but we didn't sleep together. It was after that night in the woods. She didn't want to be alone." Will accepted this answer.

"Did you really beat up Steve Harrington?"

This time there was awe in his voice. He didn't want Will to think it was okay to get into fights but he couldn't deny that he felt better after hitting Steve. Jonathan knew he was an angry person but the events leading up to the argument had his temper simmering. Everything boiled over when Steve brought his mom and brother into the argument. "Yeah, I did." Will's eyebrows got lost in his bangs. "I should have walked away."

"Why didn't you?"

"Because he said some things he shouldn't have." Jonathan considered his answer. "And I was tired of being pushed around."

"He's such a douche bag." Will backed his brother. A month ago, Jonathan would have agreed. But Steve saved his life and he wouldn't forget it.

"He has his moments," Jonathan said. "But he's trying to be better. I guess that's all we can really ask for. We all have douche bag moments." He was thinking of himself when he said that and the pictures he'd taken of Nancy. He wasn't perfect, far from it.

"I heard what he said. I'm glad you hit him." Will shrugged. "I guess I'm glad that you didn't just take it and not do anything." He looked at his older brother with admiration. Jonathan's chest warmed.

"I'll always be in your corner, Will. You know that, right?"

"Yeah, I know."

Soon after, they finished up dinner and headed back to Hawkins. Jonathan could see the anxiety setting into his brother. The closer they got to home, the less animated he was. When they got back into town, Jonathan turned down the main drag and away from their home. He suggested that they pick up a movie to finish off their night of fun. His brother perked up slightly at the idea and they pulled into the video store parking lot. The shop was close to the general store that their mom worked at. As Jonathan slid out of the driver's seat, he saw something that made his stomach drop. Lonnie's Oldsmobile was illegally parked on the corner. He could see him standing in the store arguing with his mom. Blocking the scene from Will's view he said, "I'm going to let mom know we're back. Go pick something out. I'll be back in a minute." Excited at the prospect of picking out the flick, he darted into the video shop and headed straight for the R-rated section.

As quickly, and inconspicuously as possible, he made a beeline for Melvald's only to realize that a crowd was starting to form outside. That's all they needed, Jonathan thought. As if Hawkins didn't have enough to talk about. He could hear their shouts from outside the door.

"I'll take them, Joyce! I swear to God, I'll get custody!"

The crowd froze at his appearance and slowly parted to let him through.

".... Father of the year, Lonnie! You never cared..."

Ignoring people had become a favorite pastime of Jonathan's but it was a little harder when their family's dirty laundry was being aired out for the town to see. His ears burned as he reached for the door.

"You were in it for the money! Thinking you could sue for Will's death! You had that cooked up before the funeral was planned!" His mother spat back at his dead beat dad. That statement stopped Jonathan dead in his tracks. He knew Lonnie had an angle for coming back. Lonnie always had an angle. He just didn't think the man would stoop that low. His mom kept that from him. Looks like Jonathan

wasn't the only one who tried to protect someone from Lonnie. Mentally preparing himself, he entered the store and let the door slam closed behind him. That got their attention.

He could see from where he was standing that his mom was shaking with rage. Regret filled her eyes. She hadn't meant for him to hear that. Jonathan shook his head to let know she didn't need to apologize. He wasn't surprised, not really.

"You need to leave." He took his place by his mom, angling his body so he was half a step closer to Lonnie.

"I'm not leaving without seeing him. I want answers. No one would tell me shit over the phone. Where is he?" Jonathan could smell the beer on his breath. Lonnie took another step forward. He no longer feared his father but the man made his blood boil. He thought of the conversation he had with Will earlier that night. It would feel good to hit Lonnie.

"Alright, move on everyone. Mind your own business." A gruff voice sounded from outside the door. A moment later, Chief Hopper stepped through the door. Lonnie snorted and shook his head.

"Nothing for you to see here, Hopper," he turned his attention to the police officer. Jonathan's stomach coiled. He knew that tone. Lonnie was looking for a fight. "This is a private matter."

"It was a private matter until you made a scene and someone called the police department." Hopper's voice sounded official but an angry under current was also present. "Now it's my business."

"You just can't stay away from my family, can you?" He took a step towards Hopper. "Maybe you've laid eyes on my kid. Is he really alive, like the papers say?"

Joyce stepped out from behind Jonathan. "You know he's alive, Lonnie. He's recovering and the doctors say it's best for him to get back into his normal routine. You are not part of his normal routine."

Jonathan reacted as quickly as Lonnie did. By the time Lonnie swiveled to yell at his ex-wife, Jonathan had stepped in front of her

again. "Your mother doesn't need you to fight her battles for her, kid."

"No, she doesn't," he agreed with his father for once. "But she's right. You haven't been around in over a year. You think coming here and causing a scene in the middle of town is good for Will? Go back to Indianapolis."

"You have two options here, Lonnie. Get in your car and go home or we'll go for a ride to the station." Hopper said. "As far as I can see, Joyce has full custody of the kids. You're overstepping your boundary here."

"She has full custody for now. You think a court would let you keep them after everything that's happened? You're an unfit mother, Joyce." Joyce made to shout back at her ex-husband when Hopper stepped in.

"Regardless of what you think, she has full custody right now." His tone had an edge to it. "So what's it going to be? Because I can tell you right now being arrested, again, won't look good in court if you choose to pursue custody of the boys."

Realizing that he was out of time, he aimed a glare at Joyce before turning on his heel and storming out of the store. Hopper hesitated before turning to follow Lonnie. "You know that's bullshit, right?" It took Jonathan a second to realize the man was speaking to him. "You and Will aren't going anywhere. There is a file this thick on him at the station."

"Yeah, I know." Jonathan felt a hand on his back and smiled slightly at his mom.

"Good, I'm going to make sure he doesn't make any detours."

From the store window, the pair watched as the chief followed Lonnie down the main drag. Not for the first time, Jonathan wondered what it would be like to have a father who gave more than he took from their family.

November 1984

"You have to let her go." Joyce argued. "All of the other kids are

going."

"You're going to let Will go?" Hopper's voice was filled with skepticism.

"Of course!"

"Really? But you're going to be his date, right?" Hopper snorted.
"Joyce, you smother that kid."

"No, I'm not going as his date," Jonathan could hear her eyes roll from where he was sitting the living room. "I'll just sit on the bleachers with the other parents."

"Joyce, it's a middle school dance. The parents don't sit and watch. Give him some space!"

"Oh, because you're one to talk," she shot back at him. "You kept Jane locked up in the woods for a year!"

"It was for her protection!" Their argument was escalating to a shouting match. "Can no one understand that? I have to hear it from her, the Wheeler kid, and now you?"

"You can't keep her locked up forever, Hop!"

"And you can't be with Will every minute of the day!"

Growing tired of their argument, he sighed and tried to focus on his book. The silence that followed caught his attention. He looked up to see his mom and the chief glaring at him.

"Something you want to add?" Hopper crossed his arms over his chest. His mom looked quite annoyed with him. He fought to bite back a smirk.

Realizing they were actually waiting for him to respond, he closed his book and sat up. "Well, it's just that you're both right." The pair blinked at him. "And you're both wrong." They didn't like that observation. "Mom, he's right. Will is growing up. You walk in on him when he's in the bathroom. He's going to be in high school soon. You have to give him some privacy."

"Thank you," The exasperation in Hopper's voice only mad Joyce angrier.

"But she's right too." Jonathan continued.

"HA!" Joyce poked a pointy finger into the man's chest.

"Isn't the whole idea to slowly transition Jane into Hawkins? It's a couple of hours for one night. All of her friends are going. It's a big deal to them. And she's always felt left out..."

"Alright, alright, alright," he cut Jonathan off with a wave of his hand. "Enough of the guilt trip. Who knew a stupid dance could be such a big deal?" Jonathan shrugged at that idea. He didn't care much for school dances and hadn't gone to The Snow Ball when he was Will's age. "She can go for a couple of hours."

Joyce smiled, her anger gone. "Good, that's settled."

"My half is settled. Yours isn't." He reminded her. "You can't be at the dance."

Temper flaring again, Joyce stepped into the taller man's personal space to start the argument up again. Jonathan tried not to laugh at the scene. She was at least a head shorter than Hopper and he didn't look intimidated in the least.

"Mom, if it makes you feel any better, I'll be there." That got their attention.

"You will?"

"Why?"

"I was asked to take the portraits and yearbook photos. And Nancy is chaperoning so she'll be there too."

Joyce turned this information over in her head. Having Jonathan around was the next best option if she couldn't be there. Hopper ran a hand over his scruff.

"I get to drop him off." She argued with the two. "It's his first dance. I

get to drive him."

"And I get to drop her off." Hopper said. "For the same reasons."

"And then you leave them alone," Jonathan eyed them both up. Sure, he would keep an eye on the kids but he wasn't going to watch them like a hawk.

"Fine," Hopper grumbled. "But she's not Wheeler's date, got it? I don't want any funny business going on."

March 1985

Bracing himself again the brisk wind, Jonathan zipped up his jacket and trotted into the grocery store. Spring was trying to break through the harsh Indiana winter. In Jonathan's opinion, it wasn't trying hard enough. It was almost April but the weatherman was calling for snow this weekend. Too stubborn to wear a coat, he braved the elements and sighed with content when the automatic doors slid to a close behind him.

With the crappy weather came bad colds and the flu. The Byers were currently battling both. It seemed like no matter what they did the trio couldn't help passing germs to each other. And it didn't help that Jane had no immune system. She picked up every stomach bug, head cold, and fever that might be living in Hawkins. Hopper assumed that was the case because she hadn't been exposed to germs as a young child. She simply didn't have an immune system.

This meant that she spent the majority of the fall and winter sniffling and hacking. And passing her germs onto the rest of them.

They didn't always pick up whatever illness she had but this week hit them all hard. She, Joyce, and Will were all laid up recovering at the house. And they were running out of supplies.

Having just finished up his shift at work, Jonathan grabbed a basket and headed to the canned food aisle. It looked like The Byers weren't the only ones sick in Hawkins. All of the canned soups were picked over. Will would have to do without chicken and stars. They were out of tomato soup too. Frowning slightly, Jonathan picked out a variety

of options and headed towards the pharmacy for more cough medicine and Tylenol.

Picking up some crackers along the way, he turned up aisle seven only to find Hopper studying the label on a bottle of cough syrup. A shopping cart was parked to the side, filled with food and medicine. He looked up when Jonathan approached.

"Looks like we had the same idea," he turned his attention back to the bottle in his hand. "They only have cherry. She hates cherry. It's hard enough getting her to take the stuff." He groaned.

"We still have almost a full bottle of grape at the house." Jonathan offered. "Will doesn't mind cherry."

"You do?" His voice was full of hope.

"Yeah, it was in the back of the medicine cabinet."

"Oh thank God," he placed the offending bottle of cherry cough syrup in the cart. "I don't have it in me to fight over medicine tonight."

Jonathan picked up a box of children's Tylenol.

"I already grabbed that," Hopper said. "And some regular Tylenol for your mom. Did she go to work today?"

Jonathan shook his head and put the box back on the shelf. "No, her fever was pretty high."

"Did she go to the doctor?"

"What do you think?" Hopper rolled his eyes and muttered something about stubborn women. Jonathan could have pointed out that he wasn't much better when he was sick. Instead, he kept that comment to himself.

"Okay," Hop turned to look at the contents of his cart. "I think we've got everything."

Jonathan turned to see a small feast of canned soup. Looks like everyone was getting their favorite after all, he thought to himself.

"Your mom likes tomato, right?"

"Yep."

"And Will is a chicken and stars man."

"That he is."

"What about you?"

"I'm not sick," Jonathan pointed out.

"Yet," Hopper corrected him. "I have a feeling this one is going to knock all of us on our asses."

Spotting a can of cream of mushroom soup in the bottom of the cart, he pointed it out. "You've got me covered."

In the end, Hopper was right. They were all sick by the end of the week and grateful for the comfort food.

September 1985

The cold woke Jonathan from a deep sleep. Shifting his comforter up to his nose, he found that it did no good. He could see his breath. This observation woke him more than the chill. He was lying in his bed, in his bedroom, inside and could see his breath. With a groan, he realized what that meant. The furnace stopped working. Again.

The first cold front of the fall season rolled into town the previous evening. Joyce turned the heat on just after dinner and held her breath. They barely made it through the previous winter with the old furnace. When it sputtered to life, she caught her oldest son's eye and they both smiled. Looks like they were in luck, she said. Looks like we jinxed ourselves, Jonathan now thought.

Braving the cold, he got out of bed and pulled on the warmest clothes he could find. After pulling on a sweater and jeans, he hunted down socks and his boots. The sun had come up but his clock told him everyone else in the house would still be asleep. Creeping down the hallway, he stopped at the hall closet to pull out some spare blankets only to find that the majority of them were missing. Grabbing what

was left, he peeked into Will's room to find that he was still asleep with an extra blanket thrown over his comforter. Adding another to his brother's sleeping form, he left just as quietly as he entered. After checking on his mom, he found her also sleeping and bundled up. He left another blanket with her and turned to the front of the house where Jane most likely would be. The girl was still curled up on the couch and blinked owlishly at him when he entered the living room.

"Cold." She said and snuggled deeper under the covers.

"Yeah, I know. I'm going to find a space heater. That will help." Dropping his last blanket over her, he left the house and realized it was the same temperature outside as it had been inside. He found the space heaters quickly and hauled them inside. Jonathan didn't know how long it would take to get the heat back on but there was no sense in everyone freezing in the meantime. Jane was his first stop. He placed the heater as close to the girl as the power cord would allow. Then he moved back to his mom and brother's rooms and did the same.

Frustration brewed in his chest when he realized that he didn't know what to do about the furnace. He knew next to nothing about home maintenance and wasn't mechanically inclined. Even if the problem was an easy fix, he wouldn't know what he was looking for or what tools would be needed.

Footsteps pulled him out of his internal debate. The front door closed and someone walked through the kitchen. Judging by the heavy footfalls, Jonathan knew it was his mom's boyfriend. He met the man in the kitchen.

"The furnace died," Jonathan stated the obvious.

"Yeah, I noticed." There was a bag in his hand, which he started to empty onto the table. "We're going to bring it back to life. It's not a quick repair but it's doable. Give me a hand?"

Jonathan almost hesitated. He wasn't good at these things. He was creative and had the potential to be a fantastic photographer. But he was not a handy man. After a moment, he responded. "I don't really know what I'm doing."

"I guess it's a good thing I do. Come on, I'll show you."

In the end, Jonathan maybe remembered half of what Hopper showed him. He probably wouldn't be able to replace the parts again but he knew what to look for should the problem arise again. Before too long, the old furnace was pumping out heat. They re-entered the house to find Joyce starting breakfast and Will sitting with Jane on the couch.

"All fixed," Hopped announced and washed his hands at the sink. "You should be good to go for at least this winter, maybe next year too."

"Thank you," Joyce gave him a quick peck on the lips and threw a smile in Jonathan's direction. "Breakfast is almost ready if you want to wash up."

Deciding he would take a quick shower to warm up, he moved from the kitchen to his bedroom to grab clean clothes. He picked up a clean pair of jeans and t-shirt off the floor when something caught his eye. There were more blankets on his bed than usual. Normally, he slept with a sheet and comforter; but, there were two extra blankets on top. Which meant that someone had looked in on him when the heat turned off. Probably the same person who left to go to the hardware store while everyone was still sleeping. Running his fingers over the soft fabric, he realized that he was okay with the idea.

November 1985

"Did you find any?"

"No! Did you?" Will and Jane tore through the house looking for spare change. They headed for the living room when Hopper walked through the front door.

"Don't tear up the living room," he walked into the kitchen to pour himself a cup of coffee. "Joyce just cleaned up in there."

Slightly deflated, Jane rearranged the pillows on the couch carefully. Hopper rolled his eyes and dug in his pants pocket looking for quarters. Sitting at the kitchen table, Jonathan turned his attention

back to the application in front of him. A moment later, he felt someone reading over his shoulder.

"What is community col-ledge?" Jane sounded the words out.

"Community *college*," he gently corrected her. "It's school that you go to after high school."

Jane nodded in understanding. "You mean like NYU, where you're going after high school."

"Sort of," Jonathan explained. "Community college is smaller than NYU and its here in Hawkins."

"Why are you applying to community college?" Will entered the kitchen. "You don't want to go there."

"I just thought it would be a good idea to apply as a back up."

Will and Jane shared a confused look. Jane shook her head. "But everyone says you're going to NYU."

"We don't know that for sure."

"That's what Will and Joyce and Nancy say." Confusion clouded her face. Jonathan couldn't tell if she was trying to argue with him or genuinely confused.

"I applied to NYU but haven't heard back yet. It just makes sense to have a couple of options, just in case." Will looked at him like he'd grown a second head. Jane opened her mouth to correct him again when Hopper interrupted.

"Aren't you going to be late? Here," he handed over a handful of quarters. "If that doesn't keep you guys busy for a couple of hours, you're losing your touch."

Temporarily distracted by the spare change, they let the subject drop and swiftly bolted out of the house to meet up with the rest of the party.

"Thanks for the distraction," Jonathan looked down at the application

again.

"Don't worry about it," he finished off his cup of coffee. "She can be relentless when she gets on a subject. So does Hawkins have a photography program?" Stifling a groan, Jonathan shook his head. He'd hoped the conversation was over. He should have known better.

"No, they don't. But they have journalism."

"You don't want to be a journalist," Hopper pointed out. When Jonathan didn't respond, he sighed. "Why don't we cut the bullshit, huh?" He pulled a folded envelope from his jacket pocket and slid it across the table. Jonathan unfolded it and found himself looking at his acceptance letter to NYU. "Just for the record, I wasn't looking for it. You have to find a new hiding place. Jane likes to hide the math homework she doesn't want to do at the bottom of the trash. She thinks she's so original." He refilled his mug and took a seat at the table. "When did it come?"

Knowing Hopper had caught him in a lie, he shook his head. "About a month ago."

"I thought you wanted to go to NYU."

Jonathan did want to go. More than he could put into words. Wanting to go wasn't the problem. He considered his thoughts before responding.

"I do want to go but I've been thinking that now might not be the best time." His mom's boyfriend cocked an eyebrow at him. "It might be smarter to take some classes here and then transfer over."

"Would the courses transfer?" Jonathan didn't know. And he didn't appreciate the man seeing right through him either. He felt his temper start to simmer. It was his decision.

"Sure, why wouldn't they?" He snapped. Hopper set his jaw.

"I don't know," he shrugged. "Maybe because the courses at Hawkins Community College aren't on the same level as the courses at NYU."

"There is nothing wrong with community college."

"There is nothing wrong with community college," Hopper agreed. "But you don't want to go to community college and you're better than community college. You'll waste your skills and potential here."

"Good thing it's my decision to waste them." Ignoring that comment, the chief pressed on.

"So what's holding you up? It isn't money. They offered you a full ride. Are you worried about the work? We both know you're talented."

Hopper hit the nail on the head and didn't even realize it. It was the finances. Jonathan might have been offered a full ride but that didn't mean his family could afford for him to go. He crunched the numbers over and over again. It didn't matter how he figured the budget. They needed his income to make ends meet. He wouldn't leave them like Lonnie had. As if reading his mind, Hopper continued.

"You aren't Lonnie." This made Jonathan look up. They locked eyes. Hopper refused to stand down. "You going to college isn't the same as him walking away. You're a senior in high school. You're supposed to leave."

"I know," he ran a hand through his hair. He didn't have to tell Hopper the whole reason he threw away his acceptance letter but maybe he owed him a little bit of an explanation. "With everything that's happened the past couple of years, it just seems like every time I'm not around something bad happens."

"That's over now," Hopper sipped on his coffee. "You can't put your life on hold waiting for something that might happen."

"We thought it was over last time."

"If it's not, we'll handle it. If we need you, we'll call. It's not like you're never coming back." He finished off his coffee. "Just think about it, okay? You'll make the right decision."

A few weeks later, when Jonathan got his acceptance letter to Hawkins Community College, Hopper outed him to Joyce. He claimed that he wouldn't have said anything if Jonathan hadn't been

an idiot. After a couple of hours, many tears, and one blowout of an argument (that made Jane's temper tantrums look like child's play), Jonathan's acceptance letter was proudly displayed on the fridge. A week later his name was on the list of incoming freshmen attending NYU. Jonathan didn't know if he was furious with the chief of police for interfering or grateful for giving him the push he needed. Maybe a little bit of both.

January 1986

Hopper gripped the steering wheel tightly and willed his heart to slow down. He mentally told himself to ease off the gas pedal. The last thing they needed was for him to wreck his truck too. The winding road was dark and spotted with ice. Snow lined the edge of the road and the tree branches lurched ominously over the hood of his truck. His stomach fluttered as he hit a small patch of ice. Easing off the gas, he turned the wheel in the opposite direction and let the vehicle correct itself.

He saw the red flares on the road before he came upon the accident. Turning his hazard lights on, he pulled off to the side and fought the urge to run up to the scene. A tow truck was hooking up the mangled Ford to be brought in for repair. Cursing under his breath, he ran a weary hand down the scruffy beard he had acquired over the past couple days. He spotted his girlfriend's oldest son sitting on the back of an ambulance. Again, his stomach turned at the blood on the teenager's face. Before he could make his way over to Jonathan, Office Powell walked his direction.

"Hey Chief, it's a real mess over here."

"What the hell happened?" Hopper removed the flashlight from his belt and quickly took in the wreckage. From a cursory glance, it looked like he wrapped his car around a tree.

"The kid says he swerved to miss a deer. Hit a patch of ice and lost control of the car. Ran straight into that tree." Powell pointed to a big pine tree and didn't look any worse for wear.

"Was anyone in the car with him? Anyone coming the other way?"

"No, it was just him. He's lucky, Hop. The neighbors heard the crash and came looking. When they found him he was unconscious and the hood was on fire. They were able to get him out and put out the flames." At this comment, the Chief turned to look at the car again. Sure enough, soot and grime covered the front of the car. This time his stomach hit the ground. Cursing, he nodded an acknowledgment and headed in the direction of the ambulance.

Jonathan's shoulders were slumped and his head was buried in his hands. He looked up when he heard Hopper approaching. His eyes were glazed over and twitched between Hopper and the tow truck. Swiping angrily at his bangs, he said, "I should have just hit the deer."

"I don't know about that." Hop took a seat on the ambulance. "It still would have wrecked the car."

"Wouldn't have totaled it," Jonathan argued warily. "What are we gonna do?"

"Don't worry about the car. Are you okay?"

Ignoring the question, he continued to stare at the heap of metal being attached to the tow truck. "Can't afford another car. Things are tight enough as it is."

Even though Jonathan didn't answer his question, the fact that he opened up enough to mention their financial situation indicated to Hopper that he must have some degree of head trauma. The kid never complained about their living situation. He never commented about the tight budget they had to follow. "What did I just say? Forget about the car." Turning his full attention to Jonathan, Hop could see the emotion in his eyes. Tears glistened but didn't fall.

Dropping his head back into his hands, he took in a deep breath, held it and then let it go. The emotion was gone when he turned back to Hopper. "Does Mom know?"

"No, they called me at your house but I told her it was just a work emergency. Didn't see the point in worrying her before I had some more information."

"Good. That's good." Jonathan paused. "Thanks for that."

Hopper nodded and lit a cigarette to calm his nerves. He'd been dying for a smoke since the call came through. Thankfully, Powell had the tact to ask for him at Joyce's place. He knew to let Hopper handle the situation. Hopper thought he'd pulled off a damn good act. From the moment Powell told him about the accident, he acted like it was a routine nuisance that required the chief's personal attention. He asked her to keep a plate warm for him and he'd be back soon. He didn't tell her that someone reported a major accident involving her oldest son.

"Concussion?" After a moment, Jonathan nodded. "Break any bones?" This time he shook his head. "Where did the blood come from?"

"I guess I hit my head on the steering wheel." He shrugged the question off. Hopper's temper flared. Seeing the teen act so nonchalant about the accident made his blood boil.

"You guess because you were unconscious or because you don't remember?" Jonathan flinched slightly at his biting tone. Then he shrugged again. Hop saw his eyes move back to the wreckage again.

"At least, Will and Jane weren't in the car with me," he mumbled and rubbed at the cut on his forehead.

Hopper snorted and fixed Jonathan with a look. "You would be in much better shape if she had been in the car with you. She would have stopped the car from going off the road." He mumbled under his breath.

Jonathan smirked at the notion, knowing that the man was right. The girl was very protective of the people in her life. More than once, she had sacrificed herself to save their motley crew. There was no doubt in his mind that she would have happily taken a bloody nose in exchange for his concussion.

They fell into a comfortable silence as Hopper finished one cigarette and lit up another. He heard footsteps from behind and turned to see a paramedic walking towards them. He didn't recognize the paramedic. *She must be new, he thought.*

"Chief," she extended a hand, which Hopper shook firmly. "I was just telling your son we should head to Hawkins General. From what I can tell he has a concussion and whiplash. I was able to stitch up the cut on his head but he needs to be checked out by a physician. They might want to keep him overnight for observation. He didn't seem too keen on the idea." The police officer blinked at the paramedic. She was definitely new in town if she thought Jonathan was his kid.

Jonathan found his voice before he did. "I'm not..." Hopper didn't know if Jonathan was arguing the idea of the police chief being his father or the idea of going to the hospital. The paramedic interrupted before he could finish.

"Your driver's license tells me that you are still a minor for a few more months. It's not your decision to make." She was blunt and to the point. The teen's mouth snapped shut. Hopper almost laughed. Jonathan wasn't confrontational very often but the kid couldn't hold his own in an argument with a woman. He'd seen Jonathan fold under Nancy or Joyce's glare more than once.

"That's our next stop," he reassured the paramedic. Happy with Hop's answer, she took one last look at the bandages on Jonathan's head and left. "C'mon, let's get out of here. We'll call your mom from the emergency room."

"I was kind of hoping we wouldn't have to tell her about this." Jonathan said as they walk to Hopper's truck. "She's going to freak out. Maybe we should wait until the doctor clears me."

This time Hopper did laugh. "Your funeral, kid. The longer we wait, the worst it will be." He slid into the front seat and turn on the truck. "I never thought I'd say this but a car accident would be harder to hide than a demogorgon."

"Our lives are so screwed up," Jonathan admitted. Hopper couldn't argue with him. Turning off his hazard lights, he pulled onto the road and headed to the local hospital. As they passed the wreck, Jonathan's eyes grew wide. "It looks worse from here."

"No," Hopper's voice hardened. "It's just as bad from here as it is up close." Jonathan tore his eyes from the road to look at the police

chief. "I won't sugar coat this. This was really bad kid. You are lucky you walked away at all." Swallowing hard, he pressed on. "I didn't know what to expect when the call came through. This was the best case scenario."

After a moment, he continued. "And you're right; it's good that the kids weren't with you. But you were in a very dangerous situation tonight. And I'm not okay with that." He felt Jonathan's eyes slide over to him. "Next time you get behind the wheel, you'd better toe the line and follow the speed limit to a 'T'. Hell, I want you driving below the speed limit."

"I wasn't speeding tonight, Hop."

"Don't care," he shut down the teen's argument. "Don't ever do that again. Got it?" He knew he was being irrational, but damn if he cared about being rational at this point in time. The kid had scared him and would put more gray hairs on his mom's head when they called with the news. Not waiting for Jonathan to answer, he continued with his rant. "And don't worry about the damn car, alright? I will figure it out."

And he did. The following week, he showed up with a hand-me-down beater that was older than Jonathan's previous car but in better shape. Hopper said something about it not being much to look at but the loner didn't hear him. The back of his throat burned slightly. He didn't trust himself to talk. Instead, he simply nodded when Hopper told him they would figure out payment later.

August 1986

"Okay, you have everything you need," Joyce rambled as she ran her hands over Jonathan's shoulders, like she would never hug him again. "And you're sure you have enough leg room? Because we can always send you some of your things. Can you see out the back window and check your blind spots?"

"Yeah, mom." He assured her. "Everything is fine." He let her fuss for a few more moments as a favor to both her and her boyfriend. The previous night Hopper asked him to let Joyce hug and fuss over him as much as she wanted. His leaving would be tough on all of them

but especially on his mother. He caught Will's eye and smirked lightly. His younger brother was enjoying seeing their mother fawn over someone other than him.

"Maybe you should get in and check your mirrors one more time, just to be safe." She worried a hangnail on her thumb.

Instead of sliding into the car to appease her, he pulled her into his arms. Jonathan felt his mom melt a little. She was really struggling with him leaving for NYU. They didn't say anything for a moment. He waited for her to pull away first. The small family knew that moment was rapidly approaching. The moment when the oldest Byers would leave the small house they called home.

"I know I'm being silly." Joyce rambled. "This happens every year. Kids graduate high school and go to college. This is normal. We get to be normal sometimes too." No one asked what she meant by that. They understood her line of thinking. There were many times over the past couple years that they wondered if they would be alive to partake in such normalcy. But the moment had come and now they had to deal with this too. "It's all going too fast. I swear you were just a baby a minute ago and then I blinked! And now you're eighteen and before you know it, Will and Jane will be eighteen!"

"Okay, okay," Jonathan interrupted her thought process before she could really get worked up. Throwing an arm around her shoulder, he led her back to the porch where Will and Jane were standing.

"We don't actually know how old I am." Jane argued. This made Joyce shake her head in exasperation and Will giggle. Something pulled at Jonathan's heart. He would miss this.

Seeing an opening to save his brother, Will stepped up. "Mom, he should get going and try to miss traffic." He sent his younger brother a grateful look. That comment would get the job done.

"Yes, the fewer cars on the road the better." she nodded. "I'm just going to get my camera. I need one more picture of the three of you." She scurried off into the house. They could hear her talking to herself through the open door. She couldn't find her camera. Yes, Jonathan was going to miss this.

Eying up his brother, he pulled him into a tight embrace. "Don't let her be too sad, yeah?" Will nodded with tears in his eyes. "You either." He pulled back and laid a kiss on his kid brother's head. A task that was a little hard to do considering he'd finally hit a growth spurt and was almost as tall as Jonathan. "If you need me, I'll be here." He turned to include Jane in that sentiment. "If either of you need me, just call. I'll come back. I promise."

"We will be okay." She smiled warmly at him. Jonathan knew they would be. One of the best aspects to come out of his mom and Hopper dating was Jane being included in the family. While he could listen and try his damndest to understand what Will had been through, no one understood like she did. Their friendship brought his brother out of the darkness; and, he'd be forever grateful to the odd, unique girl that he now considered to be his surrogate sister. He hugged both of them tightly. "Good luck at school," she advised. "Make sure you find good friends. No mouth breathers." Both Byers laughed at her advice. "I made you a snack for the trip." Neither was surprised when she handed over a plastic bag of Eggos. She had even taken the time to toast them. The bag was warm and condensation lined the edges. "Don't forget, I can come to you too." She tapped a finger to the side of her head.

"If I need you all that bad, I'll pick up the phone. No need to have a bloody nose on my account." He assured her.

Jane shrugged the comment off. "I would do it."

"Found it!" Joyce's voice rang through the house. "You three get together in front of the house."

One picture turned into a dozen and before long it was time to leave. He gave everyone one final hug and climbed into the old car Hopper had given him earlier that year. Although both Joyce and Jonathan fought to pay the man back, he wouldn't hear of it. He insisted that that it was cheap and they had more than paid him back by keeping an eye on Jane. Jonathan knew this wasn't the case but the chief could be bull headed when he wanted to be.

He allowed himself to look in the rearview mirror just long enough to regret the decision. His whole life was in that reflection. Will towered

over their mother now. Even twenty yards away, he could tell that they were all crying. Taking a deep breath, he pushed down on the accelerator before the urge to turn around overtook him. The decision to leave Hawkins had been near impossible. He had aspirations and dreams but his family had always come first. It was engrained in him. It was a lesson he learned early in life. Leaving his mom and brother behind went against every fiber of his being. He couldn't protect and provide for them if he wasn't around. It had never crossed his mind that someone else could step up and help out. That someone would *want to* help.

With his brain on autopilot, he easily navigated the streets of Hawkins. He passed the turn off for Nancy's parent's house. It never really felt like her home. She was already in New York waiting for him.

He was just outside city limits when the red and blue lights caught his attention. Confused for a moment, he looked down at the dashboard. He wasn't speeding. Sighing, he eased off the gas and onto the shoulder. The police officer parked right behind him. It took Jonathan a moment to realize the vehicle belonged to Hopper. He rolled down the window as the man approached.

"Aren't we outside your jurisdiction?" He joked.

"Kid, my jurisdiction goes as far as I want it to," the older man said and threw him a cocky smirk. "Sorry I wasn't around for the farewell."

"It's not a big deal." Jonathan shrugged. Hop had been called into work late the previous night. He left a note on the kitchen table apologizing.

"Yeah, it is." He disagreed. "How's your mom holding up?"

"About like you'd expect," Jonathan said. "You might want to get home for dinner tonight."

"I'll pick up some flowers," he said more to himself than Jonathan. He turned his attention back to the car and smirked. "Snacks for the road?" He was looking at the bag of waffles on the passenger seat.

"You know it." The silence grew uncomfortable for a moment. A car passed and Jonathan wondered if there was something on the man's mind.

Finally, he spoke. "I want you to take this." He pulled a wad of cash from his back pocket. Before Jonathan could open his mouth to argue, Hopper beat him to it. "I want you to take it and use it for emergencies. You're a pretty smart kid so you'll use it responsibly. Be careful when you get there. New York isn't Hawkins."

"Thank God for that," Jonathan mumbled under his breath.

"Yes and no," Hopper smirked. "There shouldn't be a gateway to the Upside Down in Times Square. But if there is stay away from it. Watch for pick pocketers. They are everywhere. If you get into trouble, use the money or call. We'll do what we can to help from here."

Taking the money, he nodded and put it in the glove compartment. "Drive safe and call your mother when you stop for gas. Let us know when you get in."

"I will." Content with the way the conversation went; he tapped on the roof of the car and walked back to his truck.

Jonathan was left with an empty feeling in the pit of his stomach. Something was missing from the interaction. Jerking on the door handle, he bolted from the car. "Hopper!" The man turned, waiting for him to say something.

How could he put into words what needed to be said? Struggling for a moment, he thought of all of the things this man had done for him and his family over the years. This wouldn't be the last time the two spoke but it needed to be said.

"Thank you."

Jonathan put everything on his mind into those two words and hoped that the man would understand what he was trying to say. Being the observer that he was, he could practically see the lump in Hopper's throat. Both swallowed their emotions down.

The chief of police nodded before saying. "I know you are your mother's son but don't worry about them. I've got them."

"They've got you too." Something else came to his mind just then. "If Lonnie..."

Hopper's eye hardened at his father's name. "I can handle him too." He hesitated for a second before closing the distance between them. Both waited a beat before going in for a brief tight embrace. "I know this is a tall order, but worry about yourself for once. Put yourself first for once." He pulled away from the embrace first, squeezed Jonathan shoulder, got back in his truck and drove off.

Jonathan slid into his car. His stomach no longer felt empty. Leaving his family behind would never be easy, but knowing that Hopper would be there made leaving okay. He eased the beat up car onto the road. This time the thought of looking in the rearview mirror never crossed his mind. Another set of eyes would be looking out for that part of his life. He could set his forward and focus on the road ahead of him.